~~Chapter VI~~

MARRIAGE.

Like most so-called "primitive" peoples, the Bella Coola regard the married state as the natural, ~~and~~ normal condition of man. Any ~~man or woman~~ one unwilling to ~~marry~~ wed ~~would be~~ is considered mentally deficient. The relative number of the sexes is approximately equal, so that the ony persons forced to live alone are ~~a few~~ elderly widows and widowers, and ~~xxxxxxxx~~ those crippled, either mentally or physically. Such individuals are ~~considered to be~~ looked upon as unfortunate; in fact, ~~to~~ they have failed in one of the most ~~elementary~~ fundamental of life's struggles. Man provides fish and game, builds houses and canoes, while woman collects berries, makes baskets, cooks and performs the multitudinous small household tasks. ~~"Is it natural and proper that a man and woman should marry?"~~ "Is it not to the benefit of each to marry?" say the Bella Coola.

Marriage is not a mere economic arrangement, nor is it ~~xxxxx~~ sole function to regulate ~~the~~ relations between the sexes. ~~Probably~~ Its most important feature ~~to the Bella Coola~~ is that it governs the status of the child. Firmly believing that he ~~xxxx~~ has descended from ancestors who came to this earth in the beginning of time, the Bella Coola wishes to have his children firmly established in the path of his forebears. This can only be accomplished with the aid of a suitable mother. It follows that ~~Bella Coola~~ marriage is not primarily regulated by affection, but by the ancestral suitability of the contracting parties.

Choice of Mate.

Since the initiative for marriage is taken by the man in almost all cases, it will be convenient and proper to describe the factors which enter into the search for a wife, ~~from the masculine viewpoint~~, remembering that the converse govern the decision of the woman and her relatives. ~~The Bella Coola regard~~ The choice of the woman who is to be the mother of the children who will carry on the traditions of the ancestral family is a matter of too great importance to be entrusted to ~~them~~ any young person. Accordingly, while their son is yet a child, his parents often discuss who would be a suitable wife for him. They view the matter from a strictly business standpoint. Proud of their own ancient lineage, they would not demean themselves by allowing their son to marry a girl who could not trace her ancestry back to the first people,

or with one whose forbears had disgraced themselves by marriage with a slaves. Instead, it is a matter of pride for ~~a man~~ parents to have as daughter-in-law the child of a powerful chief. Nor can they choose a woman too closely related to their son. Marriage with a sister, an aunt, ~~or~~ a niece, or any first cousin is strictly prohibited. ~~The writer failed to learn any~~ ho reason for these laws of incest could be obtained; the Bella Coola consider that it would be "indecent" or "dirty" so to marry, but have ~~philosophi~~ theor zed no further about the matter. An adopted child is ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ regarded in the same light as an own child. The Bella Coola know, and are amused by, the regulation of marriage according to crests among the northern tribes, but practise nothing of the same nature themselves. In fact, as will be seen, marriages usually take place among those who ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ are descended from one ancestor and who have, accordingly, what may be termed the same "crest."

Having eliminated those girls who are too closely related, ~~to their son,~~ or who are unsuited on account of their poverty of their parents, the father and mother can concentrate on others ~~girls~~ of approximately the same age as their son, ~~or~~ The most desirable is ~~one~~ a member of the ancestral family of ~~either his mother or his father.~~ one of the parents. Not only does this obviate the dangers and difficulties of marriage with a stranger, but any children will be born into the close-knit circle of related ancestors stretching back to the beginning of time. They consider that such a child is fortunate, as if he were held close in the spiritual embrace of his powerful forefathers of antiquity. ~~Moreover, such a marriage is desirable from the business standpoint.~~ mating Each ancestral family id jealously proud of its ancient traditions and prerogatives ~~so that the members are unwilling to have some of these go afield~~ and as some of these are transmitted at marriage, it follows that a mating within the ranks of the ancestral family is desirable from ~~the~~ a business standpoint. Moreover, it is recognized that the husband obtains more than the wife at marriage, and that her relatives are more likely to be generous when their son-in-law is one ~~with~~ to whom they are related. Indeed, some ancestral families ~~have~~ are so "stingy", (to use the Bella Coola expression), that for generations they have habitually married endogamously. In such cases it is not unknown for the children of first cousins to ~~marry~~ wed, though this is usually regarded as not quite proper. The most common

Bella Coola marriages are between the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of first cousins, or between the child and grandchild of a first cousin when of suitable age. According to mythology, marriages have sometimes taken place between brother and sister in order to preserve the traditions within the family, and it appears highly probable that marriages have occasionally occurred between first cousins, although no specific instances could be learnt. As long as the laws against incest are obeyed, any girl of suitable age who is addressed as numao (1) is a fit partner. Since ancestral families have usually become localized in certain villages, it follows that there is a strong tendency to village endogamy, though this is not compulsory. It will be noticed that the restrictions on marriage are of a bi-lateral nature, and that the preferences are equally bi-lateral, with a tendency to become patrilineal, in accordance with the patrilineal tendency of the ancestral family as already described.

These considerations greatly restrict the selection of a suitable daughter-in-law, yet there always remain a number of possible choices. The parents of the prospective bride-groom consider the material advantages of each of these. Since the ability of a man to give potlatches depends largely on the wealth contributed by his wife's immediate family, the wise parents eliminate a girl whose brothers are lazy. Moreover, they know that their children will receive prerogatives from maternal grandparents, hence it is advantageous to choose those who have valuable kusiut dances, or other desirable rights. Ancestral names are not so important, because these are the potential property of all members of the ancestral family. A great consideration is the industriousness of the girl herself, though this is less important than the working ability of her father and brothers. The writer remembers discussing marriage with a very old man who had had four wives. After describing the idiosyncrasies of the four, the Indian continued:

"My last wife was by far the best. Her family gave me many presents."

Frequently the choice of a wife is simplified by an institution which may be termed "return marriage." If, for example, a few generations ago a woman was married into another ancestral family, or into a distant branch of her own, it is considered proper for a man of her family to receive as wife a woman of the family into which she had married. At the previous marriage, the woman's family bestowed

(1). See p.

much wealth and valuable ~~xxx~~ prerogatives; it is proper that the latter should be returned to the ancestral family of their owners. ~~Moreover,~~ A return marriage also binds two families together, with consequent strength to the children. A few examples will make the matter clear:—

In the beginning of time it is believed that a son of Smaoʌn married the daughter of a Kitlobe chief. (1). ~~She~~ As dower she brought her husband several Kitlobe names, which were transmitted in time to her children and ~~which xxx~~ remained in Smaoʌn's home, Kimsquit, for many generations. The Bella Coola believe that it was ~~the remembrance was preserved for xxxxx~~ remembered hundreds of years that these names ~~were not~~ did not belong in Kimsquit ~~names.~~ Whenever one was conferred, the myth was recounted to tell how the name first came to Kimsquit; ~~and~~ while in Kitlobe when the myth from which the names were taken was recounted, it was always added that the names in question could not be used since they were now ~~belonged~~ in Kimsquit. About one hundred and fifty years ago a certain Kimsquit woman, Ätsq̇wtutɬ by name, was married to a Kitlobe man to repay this debt, and cement friendship between the two tribes. ~~Similarly, if any portion of an ancestral myth, whether it be a name or any~~ She took as dower the names long ago brought from Kitlobe. Similarly, if any name or other prerogative of an ancestral myth has been alienated from the ~~fx~~ ancestral family to which it belongs, a father searches for a woman who will be able to restore it to his son as marriage dower. The word used for searching is "hunt", the term ~~used in~~ applied to for seeking fur bearing animals.

The accompanying pedigree illustrates a return marriage. Qwahila's daughter was married to a Fort Rupert Indian and took with her as dower several Bella Coola names and other prerogatives. The loss of these was remembered and they were brought back by the marriage of Yäkotɬ̣ɛs, a member of Qwahila's ancestral family, with a daughter of the woman who had gone to Fort Rupert. Usually several generations elapse before a return marriage is made. This incident was perfectly well known to the son of Yäkotɬ̣ɛs.

Qwahila of Q̇omqo·ts = ?
|
Nukao'sɔ of Ft. Rupert = Daughter
|
Yäkotɬ̣ɛs of Q̇omqo·ts = Daughter

(1). See p.

If parents who are seeking a wife for their son have also a daughter approaching marriageable age, they often try to avoid ~~the question of~~ a later return marriage by arranging that their daughter shall be married to a brother, or other near relative, of their son's wife. Exchange marriage ~~of this type~~ was formerly more common than at present, though even now it is considered highly desirable. The sentiment is that already described: the more closely the parents of children are bound together by ties of common ancestry, the greater will be the child's ceremonial strength. Further, reciprocal alliances obviate all ~~Marriage of this type prevents the~~ danger of feuds since ~~with respect to failure of~~ return marriages are not required.

In recent years it has become fashionable (1) with some Bella Coola families to seek wives from unrelated ancestral families, and even from other ~~foreign~~ tribes. It is said that this practice was initiated by ~~A~~ Pot~~l~~es, an important chief who died about forty years ago. He sought foreign marriages on account of the prerogatives which were brought as dowers by his wives, and considered that such rights, ~~which he was able to~~ transmitable to his children, more than compensated for the lack ~~in~~ of strength provided by related ancestors. Many ~~Bella Coola~~ have followed his example, with the result that some ancestral families have entirely abandoned the endogamic tendency. Although this exogamic principle is directly contrary to that which has been already described, yet it should be noted that each has the same explanation —— the search for a wife able to bring most to her ~~as yet~~ unborn children. ~~XXXX~~ Boas (2) has ~~xxxxxx~~ made the same observation.

Should the parents ~~xxxxx~~ consider a foreign woman as wife for their son, then her economic value is discussed from every angle. One woman may have the right to good hunting grounds, the family of another may have some valuable s<u>ɛ</u>saok prerogatives~~x~~, a third some <u>kusiut</u> rites. Anxious thought is put on the relative values of these. One ~~Indian~~ man had heard of the French system of <u>dot</u>, and emphasized strongly ~~to the writer~~ how far superior to ~~xx~~ it and more sensible ~~such a system~~ was than the Canadian practice. In recent years the younger Bella Coola have been arranging their own marriages, and the older men lament bitterly that they are only ~~xxxxxx~~ influenced by the beauty and working ability of the girl, not by her real worth, the prerogatives which she can bring to her children.

(1). The word is used deliberately to express the feeling that it is "smart" socially, or the "right thing to do." (2). P. 124

~~Finally, parents consider the desirability of the girl herself.~~

Although parents consider chiefly the ancestry of their future daughter-in-law, ~~not~~ they are not entirely oblivious to the girl herself. She must be of approximately the same age as their son, preferably a year or two older. Should the wife be the younger, it is thought that she ages rapidly until she appears as old as her husband. Boys usually marry at ~~the age of about~~ seventeen or eighteen, and it is essential that the woman chosen ~~xxxx~~ for wife should have been concealed for at least a year following puberty. Nor ~~would~~ should a weakly girl ~~be~~ be chosen, or one of notoriously bad temper. As their son reaches the age of marriage, his parents usually consult him, though it is not usual for him to gainsay their wishes. ~~In like fashion a girl has considerable influence in rejecting an unwelcome suitor, and her parents try to insure that he is not impotent. Occasionally it happens that a boy and girl elope in spite of their parents wishes, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx in which case the children would be without status in the community unless the parents agree to perform the rites that usually take place during the period of engagement, or at the actual wedding.~~ A girl who has been leading a notoriously lax life is not desired, though this is most unusual for the daughter of a chief. The feeling is that such a girl would be a faithless and fickle wife, rather than any objection to her sins as such.

Realizing the importance of marriage, the parents of a boy discuss and plan the event for years, weighing the relative values of girls whom they think they could obtain ~~xx~~ for their son. By the time he has reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, they have decided on the most suitable partner, and it then becomes necessary to consult her parents and win their approval.

Period of Engagement.

~~The father of the prospective bridegroom, whom it will be convenient to designate as X., may either interview the~~ The father of the prospective bride-groom, aided by the mother, and other ~~immediate~~ relatives have decided on a suitable partner for his son (whom it will be convenient to call X. in this section) he may either